Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

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Nuclear disarmament in context: a global governance issue

Working paper submitted by Ireland

Introduction

1. Security concerns and the security environment have been a recurring theme in our discussions at the 2017 Preparatory Committee, but when we speak of security, especially when it comes to weapons that respect no boundaries and that, if detonated, would spread their toxic poison through the air, to damage human, animal and plant life across continents, as well as pollute our water and soil, with the potential to cause famine and change our weather for a decade or more, it is also important to adjust the perspective from the national, the regional, the and the international and to take a truly global view of the risk that is integral to these weapons. In the digital age, we face threats hitherto considered unlikely. In recent times, the vulnerability of cyberinfrastructure, both civilian and military, has been challenged and compromised. We have, in recent times, witnessed the acceleration of missile programmes in certain countries, enabled through illicit procurement, intangible technology transfer and, perhaps, through cyberespionage. As reported in the recent important paper by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) on understanding nuclear weapons risk, we live in an age where cybertechnologies are in the grasp of most States, regardless of their economic capacities, as well as non-State actors. This levels the strategic playing field and creates hitherto unparalleled opportunities for small belligerent governments or terrorist groups to instigate high-impact attacks. This heightens the risk, not only of an unintended nuclear detonation but also of the determinative impact that the manipulation of data may have in decision-making. To be consistent and effective, our focus must be on the weapon and the impact of the weapon, not on the actor, and we bring this approach to our work on all weapons issues. We endorse the former Secretary-General's view that there are no right hands for the wrong weapons. Given all the risk factors, our vigilance and efforts on disarmament and non-proliferation are needed now more than ever. In this regard, Ireland is pleased to introduce the present new working paper on how our work in the review cycle of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons should be undertaken in context, not just the security context but also the wider, global risk and global governance context, mentioned by many delegates, for example, in terms of poverty, development,

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climate, environment, health, cultural heritage and gender equality. The new working paper, an updated version of which has been made available in brochure form for delegates, is based on Ireland's collaborative research with Chatham House since 2015. We hope that this research and the working paper will re-energize our efforts throughout this review cycle, and we look forward to consultation on this issue and the development of the various strands.

2. This is a time of global uncertainty and challenge. The existence of nuclear weapons does nothing to protect or to make the world a safer place in such tense and sensitive circumstances; in fact, the inherent risks of nuclear weapons make the world even more dangerous. The only actions that can truly address the risk are the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. However, given that this is likely to take some time to achieve, mitigation against current risk levels must be put in place as a matter of urgency. The risk of a nuclear detonation, either by accident or on purpose, is higher now than ever. Indefinite retention means inevitable catastrophe. The longer nuclear weapons remain and the more complacency there is about them, the more likely it is that an accident will occur. While we value all efforts at enhanced nuclear safety and welcome moves towards risk reduction and greater transparency, we believe that it is important to underline that addressing the risks should not serve to suggest any support for the indefinite retention of the root cause. Every day that nuclear weapons continue to exist is a day in which they could potentially be detonated, either accidently or on purpose, or be accessed by terrorists. Regrettably, the low level of effort being invested in nuclear disarmament remains in stark contrast to the urgency surrounding this heightened level of risk.

3. A particular risk that Ireland wishes to highlight is in the area of the growing automation of weapon systems, an issue that is currently the subject of considerable attention in the conventional weapons field. In view of the evidence indicating that many accidental nuclear weapon detonations were avoided in the past owing largely to human agency and intervention, this is an area of increased risk that needs to be highlighted with regard to the continued reliance on nuclear weapons in security doctrines. An important and integral part of our work as States parties to the Treaty should be in the area of increasing awareness. In this respect, Ireland has been particularly active with regard to raising awareness of the disproportionate gendered impact of ionizing radiation. Ireland believes it is vitally important to continue raising awareness and contributing to knowledge about this hitherto little-appreciated aspect of nuclear weapons use. (This aspect of these weapons needs greater visibility, and Ireland has submitted a dedicated working paper on this issue.)

4. Rising international tensions entail the very real potential for escalation, coupled with the possibilities of accidents and miscalculations. In addition, we see the increasing prominence of nuclear weapons in security doctrines and ongoing significant investment in modernization, much of which would have the effect of making it easier to use nuclear weapons. Against such a backdrop, action on nuclear disarmament is both timely and pressing. 2015 saw ground-breaking international agreements, one on the Sustainable Development Goals and one on climate, examples of what is possible when we work together, face reality and focus on the future. But those agreements exist under the shadow of a potential nuclear detonation, which puts their success at risk. This is a small planet, and our concept of the world as a vast and unconnected place has shifted to one where everything is interlinked. In such a world, multilateralism plays a key role and questions of security have an impact, not just nationally but on us all. Therefore, in terms of the sustainability of our planet and collective human security, there has never been a greater need for more collaborative thinking and global governance. Good progress was made with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on

climate change. But these agreements are overshadowed by the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament and all of their objectives are threatened by the risks associated with the continued existence of and reliance on nuclear arsenals.

5. In this context, nuclear disarmament and our work in the Non-Proliferation Treaty review cycle is not a side issue; it is not a technical or specialist debate and it should not be addressed as such. This issue is, in fact, an integral and horizontal one that has the potential to have an impact on all citizens and that therefore needs to be integrated with policymaking in all other areas that have a global impact. Whatever the issue that concerns us, be it migration or food security, cyberterrorism or global warming, human rights or gender equality, the potential negative impact is heightened by the complicating factor of nuclear weapons. This is no time for business as usual; this is a time for informed concern and for collective action. With all of this in mind and in order to contribute substantively to this review cycle, Ireland has been pleased to commission an updated consultation paper from Chatham House, setting out how nuclear disarmament is essentially the missing piece in the global governance jigsaw and why and how this must be addressed now.

6. The key points that we would wish to highlight from that research are set out below.

7. The paper presents nuclear disarmament as a fundamentally interconnected issue. This is a time of great challenge, on the global stage, for nations and for all of humanity. It is therefore a time for leadership and a time to accept our international obligations, our commitments and our responsibilities. Nuclear disarmament must be viewed in a global context and, if we are genuinely concerned about the sustainability of the planet, then we need to be equally concerned about nuclear issues. Therefore, the commitments we make under other international agreements also have an impact on the commitments we must make, and must fulfil, regarding nuclear disarmament.

8. It is time to understand nuclear disarmament as a horizontal issue, recognizing its impacts on broader rights and entitlements, as well as on obligations and responsibility. We need to generate informed public concern, which in turn will serve to drive the necessary political will. More collaborative multilateralism, which includes a greater understanding of the comprehensive and interconnected nature of our international obligations and how nuclear disarmament is inextricably linked, will lead ultimately to this being rightly treated as a horizontal, top-table, global governance issue.

9. The paper sets out the ways in which nuclear weapons would have disastrous impacts on a whole set of issues in which the possibility of nuclear weapons use is not currently discussed or factored into policymaking. These top-table issues include: the Sustainable Development Goals, climate change, the environment, development, gender equality, children's rights, the protection of cultural heritage, public health, non-State armed groups, humanitarian action and cybersecurity.

10. The paper makes the case that those who are concerned about the survivability of the planet and the betterment of humanity need to be equally concerned about nuclear weapons. The international commitments and obligations that countries have made on those top-table issues need to be explicitly linked to the international commitments and obligations on nuclear weapons and the lack of action on the same. Leaving nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation obligations unfulfilled will have a severe impact on all the efforts under way to address climate and environmental issues, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and other measures.

11. The paper reaches a number of important conclusions that should resonate beyond this review cycle and into the wider policy arena. These include: connecting expert and diplomatic communities across the range of issues to yield new perspectives, synergies and practical ideas; following through on the links between disarmament and development; recognizing the vital role of women in disarmament; acting on the connection between nuclear disarmament and the protection of cultural heritage; renewing action between the nuclear disarmament community and public health experts; joining the dots between nuclear disarmament and nuclear safety; exposing the cybervulnerabilities not just of civilian nuclear material but that in material use; and using the World Humanitarian Summit as a model of how nuclear disarmament can take its place among the most significant global challenges of our time.

12. The paper suggests that progress, or the lack of it, on nuclear disarmament should be factored into monitoring progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, that experts and officials working on global threats would benefit from including nuclear disarmament in their perspective and that all of these issues should be taken forward by the United Nations in a cross-sectoral approach, including joint studies, working papers, meetings and exchanges of knowledge between relevant committees.

13. The paper also proposes that the vulnerabilities and risks associated with nuclear weapons be taken into account in all security and emergency planning and that a response to a nuclear detonation should be included in all risk management and mitigation processes, as well as in recommending an examination of the capacity for a humanitarian response to such a nuclear detonation and noting the particular responsibility of the nuclear weapon States and those who have nuclear weapons on their territory, in this regard.

14. Fundamentally, the research that we have commissioned supports Ireland's view that nuclear disarmament can be truly characterized as the missing link in multilateralism. Ireland hopes that delegates will share our view, supported by the research paper, on the need for an enhanced awareness of the interconnected nature of our nuclear disarmament work and the importance of elevating this to the highest levels of our global governance, so that our Non-Proliferation Treaty commitments are reviewed in the necessary global context. We would like to see this proposition discussed further in the course of the review cycle and reflected in the outcome document.